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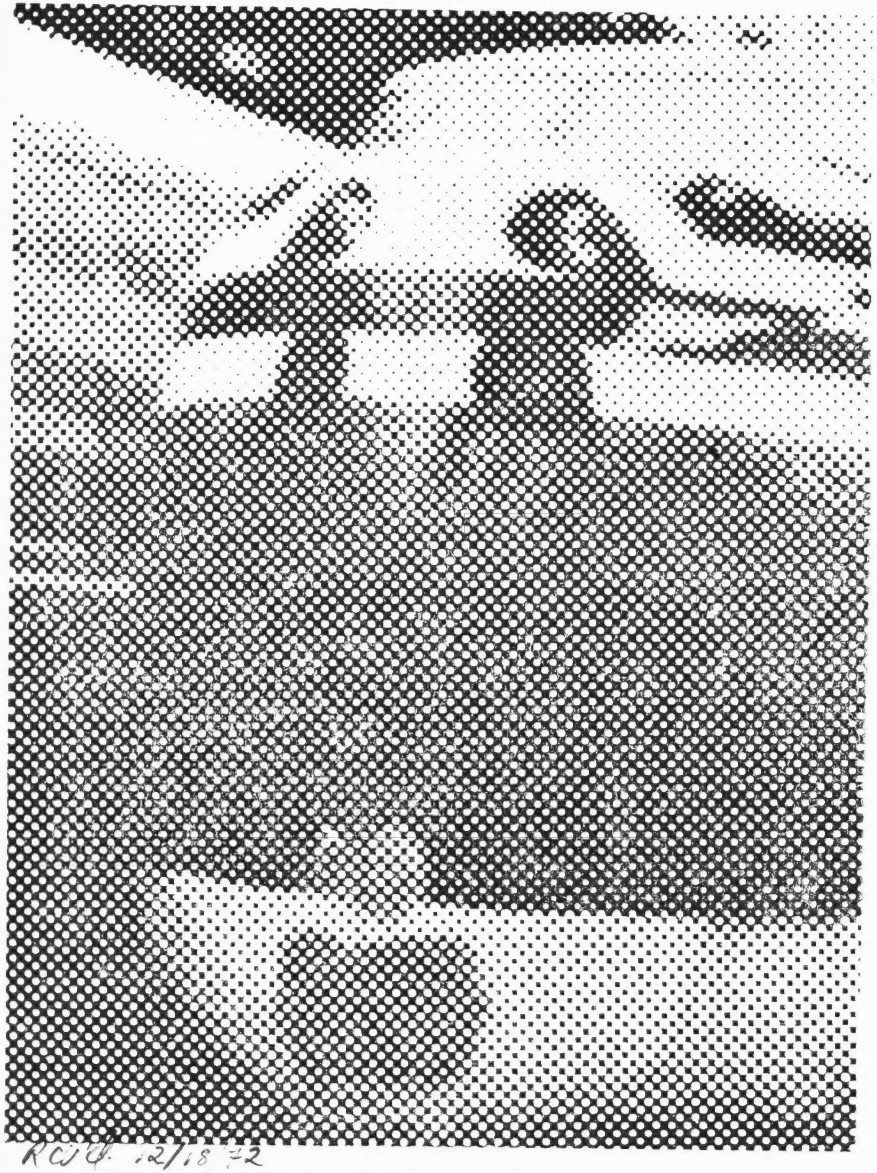
RAIL TRAVEL newsletter

VOL. 2 NO. 21
NOVEMBER 6, 1972
#47

BIG DOUBLE ISSUE — TWO ISSUES IN ONE



RCJ 12/18/72

ON THE COVER:

An Op Art-like rendition of a photo by George Hyko of the MANHATTAN TURBO taken at the northern terminus of its run, Boston's South Station. The second and concluding installment of George's comprehensive report on coast-to-coast travel on Amtrak during the "off-season" of November appears in this issue.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT TO SUBSCRIBERS

If you receive this newsletter by subscription, you will find that this is a special double issue, being a combination of the Nov. 6 and Nov. 20 issues, the two bound together. This is being done so that we may catch up on our publication schedule. This double issue counts as two issues on your subscription. In the latter part of December we will publish another such double issue, being the combined regular two issues for December. After the first of the year we will resume publication on our regular schedule, and the first issue to appear in 1973 will be the January 1 issue. These double issues are being mailed to you by third class mail instead of the usual first class. Our reasoning is that in the December postal chaos all mail will be delayed anyway, and that there will be little difference between the two classes of mail in the time RTN takes to reach you. We hope that you will agree with these decisions. While they may create some temporary inconvenience, the lack of confusion when we get back on our regular publication schedule will make this move worthwhile.

If you buy this double issue on a newsstand, you will be paying 50¢ for the double copy, just double our normal price. The two individual issues that make up this double issue will be available separately later as back issues at 25¢ each.

BE SURE not to miss the big double year-end issue to follow. We plan some very special, exciting features for the last issue of the year. If you are not now a subscriber, we urge you to write us now, enclosing $6 for a year's subscription, or requesting us to bill you, and asking us to begin your subscription with the double year-end issue. You'll want to keep that big issue for future reference, or perhaps as a collector's item. Write: Message Media, Dept. RTN, Box 9007, Berkeley, Calif. 94709.

WITH THE publication of these two November issues, Rail Travel Newsletter now completes two years of publication. We wish to thank all our many friends who have been so kind and encouraging to us during this time, and everyone who has contributed news items and other material for RTN. Many who have done so have gone unsung and unrewarded, but we are most grateful for your kind help.

We're traveling the trains worth making again.

Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 21 (Whole No. 47), November 6, 1972.
Published twice monthly, on the first and third Mondays, by Message Media.
P. O. Box 9007, Berkeley, California 94709. Subscription $6.00 per year, single copy 25¢.
STAFF: James Russell, Editor; Paul Rayton, Editor at Large; Doug Ellis, East Coast Photographer.

CABINET CHANGES MAY AFFECT AMTRAK FUNDING

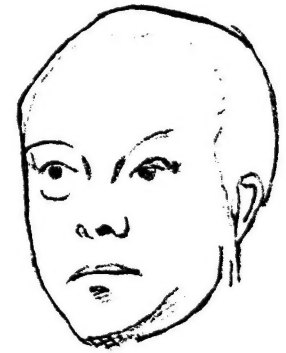
Indications are that there will be rough days ahead for further efforts at obtaining federal funding for needed public rail transportation projects. As President Nixon announced his changes in White House personnel for the coming four-year term, conservationists, public transit proponents and rail travel supporters groaned in horror.

Proposed to head the U.S. Department of Transportation is Claude S. Brinegar, replacing the pro-rail John Volpe, who will be sent to far-away Italy as Ambassador. Brinegar is an executive of the Union Oil Company of California and an automobile racing enthusiast. He is a 45-year old Republican with no previous government experience. He holds a doctorate in economic research from Stanford University. Egil Krogh Jr. was named by Nixon to be undersecretary of transportation, replacing James M. Beggs.

Claude S. Brinegar

The Highway Action Coalition, an organization seeking to open the Highway Trust Fund for use with other modes of transportation, immediately denounced the naming of Brinegar to the transportation post. The group expressed "outrage" at the move, pointing out that Brinegar's company, Union Oil, contributed heavily recently to anti-environmental legislation, was involved in the infamous Santa Barbara oil spill, and is not one of the several oil firms who have expressed support for mass transit.

The White House replied, however, that Brinegar is not an oilman, but a gifted young executive. His position on the Highway Trust Fund issue is not yet known. The Wall Street Journal conjectured that Brinegar would have to move in the direction of supporting mass transit even if his personal views toward it are negative. Congress must still approve the appointment of Brinegar.



Roy Ash

Another Nixon change, not requiring Congressional approval, is the movement of Roy Ash into the job of heading the Office of Management and Budget, replacing Caspar Weinberger, who will take on bigger game as proposed Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Amtrak supporters remember well the bouts with Weinberger over releasing Congressionally-voted funds for Amtrak funding. Weinberger expressed a distinctly anti-passenger train attitude earlier this year.

Caspar Weinberger

Ash, whose new job starts in January, was Nixon's Advisory Council on Government Reorganization chairman since that group was created in 1969 (it advised the creation of OMB, which took place in mid-1970). Mr. Ash's views on public transportation are not well known.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"The freedom to choose among alternative modes in order to obtain their benefits is well established as a basic policy of the government and is among the basic policy principles of the Department of Transportation of broadening 'the options available to individual citizens' that is, freedom of choice and lifestyle. Desirable attributes would include safety, speed, low cost to consumer, reliability of service, frequency, convenience, comfort and cleanliness as well as a number of ancillary service niceties and luxury, intangible satisfaction and specialized service packages, attributes singly or in combination desirable to segments large and small of the traveling public.

"Investigation of Amtrak's potential to fill these needs will require considerable analysis, experimentation and the exploration of new ideas and services but it is quite clear from extensive surveys of public opinion that the public holds train travel in a surprisingly high regard with respect to a large number of these attributes, and this regard is not entirely nostalgic but is based upon the special characteristics of traveling by train itself. Thus rail has a potential for meeting an element of demand which is demonstratively important to the public."

--Amtrak President Roger Lewis in address to the Executives Club of Chicago, Dec. 1

"At the tender age of two, Amtrak has still to get itself solidly placed on the rails, but its officials may be right in interpreting this year's improvements as indications that the operation may turn into a going concern sooner than they had anticipated."

--N.Y. Journal of Commerce, Nov. 24

"Despite the complaints, Amtrak is widely credited in the industry with having halted a quarter century of decay in rail-passenger service. Many railroaders believe the future is bright for the corporation--if the nation is willing to pay the price. They are convinced that the battle over Amtrak, now going on in Washington, will help shape the course of transportation in America for decades to come."

--U.S. News & World Report, Dec. 4

"Implicit in (Nixon's) shifts of personnel is an awareness that the Office of Management and Budget is not the best place to get control over spending. OMB's budget review necessarily comes at the tail end of the budget-making process. OMB's resources are so limited, spread so thin, that it is confounded when it confronts the demands and expertise of the departments. Spending impulses can better be contained at their sources, within the departments themselves. And the best way to do that is to head those departments with Secretaries who have a zest for the mission and who are hard to please."

--Wall Street Journal Editorial, Nov. 29

"Transportation is the only environmental issue on which we can excite the majority. It's not a white, middle-class, elitist issue. It's a political issue and the middle class and the poor must join together to demand what they are entitled to. We've got to convince people that transportation is important and that it can get better."

--Robert N. Rickles, executive director of the Institute for Public Transportation, in N.Y. Times, Nov. 12

Coast to Coast on Amtrak

By George Hyko

PART TWO -- CONCLUSION

Our flight into New York on the BROADWAY ended 31 minutes late, cutting a half hour off our limited sightseeing time in that city. It was a beautiful, clear autumn day in New York, and the city offered a striking contrast with the early morning glimpse out our bedroom window near Lancaster, PA, of the Amish people in their historic garb moving thru the green mist in horse-drawn carriages.

Before going above ground we bought METROLINER tickets, to leave at 3:30 for Washington, knowing the popularity of those trains. The purchase was the fastest one we've ever made, with the seller punching a few buttons and our tickets emerging all ready to use.

Train 119 left Penn Station on time. This particular METROLINER carried no club car, and we must have found the last adjoining coach seats.

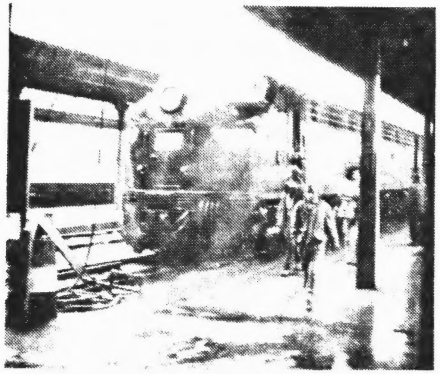
I had to telephone ahead to Washington, so tried the phone in the forward snack car. After a wasted half hour I realized the phone was out of order. The attendant was of no help at all. I went to the rearward snack car and tried that phone. It wasn't working properly either, but after a time an operator was reached, and she put my call thru. The reception over the radio-telephone was faultless. (The minimum charge for calls, incidentally, is one dollar.)

I was impressed with the riding qualities of our METROLINER. I guessed our speed to be about 50. Joining the small crowd who were peering into the operator's compartment, I saw the speedometer and was startled to find we were traveling at 109 mph! The track felt quite good to take such a speed with a smooth ride. However, somewhere beyond Philadelphia I noticed an abrupt deterioration in the rails, and it was all bumps and jolts from there to Washington, and I imagine our speed decreased as well. It was then I began to hear the mournful horn of the train blowing for crossings almost continuously. A bad spot for high-speed trains, thought I. No British Rail this, for sure.

The lengthening autumn nights brought darkness before Washington. I had erred in not bringing reading material, I found. The riders treat this train like a commuter train, heads all buried in newspapers. Indeed the cars seem designed to encourage introspection. For the first time on our long trip, I grew decidedly bored. After all the scenery, the wide-open spaces, the dome cars and roomy lounges of our previous trains, I began feeling a bit claustrophobic. The seat backs seemed too high, the windows too small, the luggage racks too low. We were hemmed in with nowhere to go except the snack bar. But then other riders didn't seem to mind. They just kept buried in their New York Times. I should try this ride again in a parlor car, I thought, before passing judgment.

Nine minutes late we reached the Capitol. Finishing our business there, we boarded the NIGHT OWL to run the whole length of the Corridor up to Boston. (The OWL was not in our original plans, but finding its bedroom space cheaper than a Washington hotel, we decided on the overnight trip.)

This bird was built out of two Penn Central engines, a baggage car, an ex-SCL, ex-B&O sleeper "Swan," the Amtrak lounge "Pine Tree State" (#3212), and two Amtrak coaches (5611 and 5420). The lounge was a refurbished car used on



Passengers detrain from Amtrak's NIGHT OWL at Boston. All photos by the author.

the first MONTREALER, and still bearing the "ED-3" line number from that historic trip. It was decorated with an Amtrak system map on which the artist had taken some geographic liberties with a broad red brush, bringing Western routes considerably closer together than reality puts them.

We left Washington one minute late (10:31) but arrived in Boston two minutes early on the leisurely overnight schedule. I can't say that the train was well-patronized. In fact it was one of the emptiest we encountered. A shame, because it certainly is a convenient train for travelers on this Northeastern route.

At Providence, where we arrived 21 minutes ahead of departure time, red storm warning flags were flying, and when we stepped off at Boston's South Station, the Corridor's northernmost extremity, it was into a cold rain and strong gusts of wind off the Atlantic. Despite the weather, we found Bostonians as cheery and helpful as perhaps only Bostonians can be.

South Station was being demolished. I watched as the wreckers carefully removed big stone slabs. "They're taking each piece down carefully because they've all been sold to someone" remarked another onlooker. A new complex of buildings will go up on the spot. I hope it's as convenient for travelers as the old station. We were able to have our laundry done, buy bakery goods and magazines, eat lunch, and easily hop on the excellent subway for a two-bit ride out of the rain, all right at the old station.

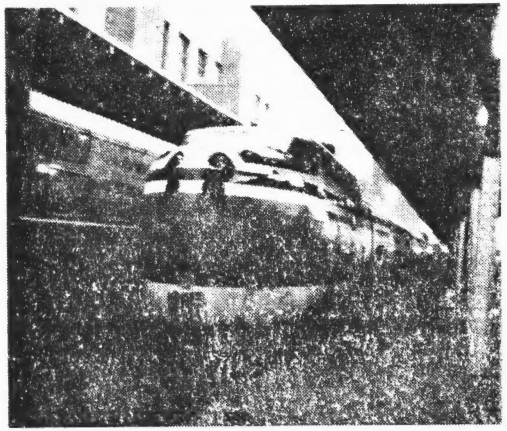
The MANHATTAN TURBO pulls into South Station at 4:05pm weekdays, and on this date it was ten minutes late. The 5-car, red, white and black articulated train glided to a stop behind a parked baggage car while I aimed my camera down from an adjoining building to catch the brilliant gleam of the lowering sun on its smooth sides. My first ride on a TURBO was nearing, and I was all expectancy. I was aboard at 4:32 as the train began to head back nonstop to Providence, where it is serviced before the next day's runs. Seated in the forward dome with a half-dozen or so other joyriders, I watched the engineer watching for the signal to highball. Then he slid back his window and shortly a roaring, hissing sound from the turbine engines began, as we started taxiing slowly down the track. Clearly, this was no ordinary train.

As we picked up speed, the rough condition of the tracks became apparent. The ride was pretty bad, but then we made it up to 95 mph on portions of the 44-mile trip, a speed a conventional train could never do on this bad Penn Central line. It was fun, but I wouldn't want to ride more than three hours on this noisy, rocking, rolling vehicle.

The train was littered with discarded timetables, newspapers, and remains of meals-at-your-seat. No food is served on this run back to the shops.

The Conductor was obviously proud of his vehicle, and he glowingly described the train's performance and features to all the interested riders. This train is clearly something else. It doesn't sound or ride like any other American train. Paul Rayton nicknamed it the "Turbulent Train." On a smooth track and with a lowered engine noise level it would make a nice machine to ride. Its nicest feature is the dome viewing. If you're faint of heart I don't recommend the engineer's view from the front dome, especially thru the rock-throwing parts of the Corridor. Each forward dome window has an extra plastic shield installed behind it for added safety. For the adventurous, it's an unusual thrill.

Providence came much too soon, even tho three minutes of lateness were tacked on. As we moved into the station we met the northbound SOUTHERN CRESCENT a bit behind its schedule.



The MANHATTAN TURBO unloads at Boston's South Station on a November afternoon.

The Providence station has a dreary interior but is very convenient to downtown. A good, large hotel is a block's walk away. The capital building stands illuminated in the now clear, crisp autumn sky.

My joyride ended, I wait for a "conventional train" back to Boston. Train 182, the NARRAGANSETT, is due thru at 5:52. (Train 179, the MERCHANTS LIMITED, heading the other way, is due at 5:54 on the next track over on the elevated station platform, and there is some small confusion about where one boards what.) The NARRAGANSETT left Providence on time, and was made up of one PC engine, Amtrak parlor car 3644 ("Nathan Hale"), PC coach 1430, PC snack bar coach 3220, and another PC coach.

The train is well-filled with largely college students. Seating myself in the snack bar coach--which is thoroughly littered with cigarette butts, napkins, etc., --I found to my surprise that the car was one of the best-riding cars of our entire 8000-mile journey. I can't say much for its decor, tho. It was done in brown and mustard, with brown and ivory linoleum. The brown upholstery looked rather new, and the plastic windows spewed out bright outside lights into broad refractory patterns.

It was a considerably more comfortable, tho slower ride than that of the TURBO. I was back in South Station at 6:45--five minutes early. My impression of Northeast conventional train travel at this point was very favorable. It was to change the next morning as we rode the VALLEY FORGE.

The same consist, essentially, that took me to South Station the night before, took us away from it and on to Philadelphia the next morning. Train 171 left promptly at 7:25am from Boston, with us enjoying comfortable seats in Amtrak-refurbished parlor car "Nathan Hale." The interior was most striking, all done in purples and blues, with contrasting bright orange paper headrest covers.

A single PC engine (changed at Harrisburg to a GG-1 electric) was pulling a Santa Fe baggage car, our parlor, 6 PC coaches (I didn't count how many were snack bars), and an SCL coach. The train was doing a very heavy business.

Breakfast menus were propped up on the little fold-up tables on the wall by each seat. They offered a $1.35 continental breakfast or a larger meal at $1.85. We had the continental breakfast of orange segments, croissant, apple-filled Danish pastry and beverage. We liked the neat, efficient way the breakfast was packaged. Stainless steel cutlery (the same cutlery

Boston's South Station was being carefully demolished.

we found all over the Amtrak system except on the SUPER CHIEF) came in a plastic sheath. There were servings of jam and butter, sugar in Amtrak and PC packets, and a PC-packaged Wash 'n Dry.

The train moved along thru a day of darkening, thickening clouds. At 7:51 we met the northbound NIGHT OWL. We got to Providence at 8:17 and met train 154, the TURBO heading up to Boston from the shops, where it would become the southbound YANKEE CLIPPER TURBO, train 153.

At one of the Connecticut stops things started going badly. Two cigar-smoking codgers boarded our parlor car and took nearby seats. They chain-smoked the smelliest cigars under the sun all the way into New York. We were starting to feel nauseous from the vile smoke. At New Haven we stopped for 13 minutes and luncheon menus were handed out. Under other circumstances I would have liked to try the breast of chicken in whiskey sauce that was offered (the other choice was baked beans, Canadian bacon and brown bread), but my churning stomach would not have accepted such rich fare.

We delayed lunch, hoping matters would improve. They didn't. At 10:42 we met a train pulled by a GG-1, that I deduced was the BUNKER HILL. The clouds were getting darker. By 11:00 it was raining. Cars and trucks on the adjoining Interstate 95 were kicking up sprays of water. Our train moved along faster than the highway traffic. We reached Stamford at 11:21, where a thermometer was reading 50°. The track was becoming rougher. We decided to go back to a snack bar for a plain, light sandwich. Alas, the rear door of our car wouldn't open. We were trapped in this stinking parlor car, unable to escape the clouds of reeking smoke, unable to obtain a small lunch snack. With some irony I recalled that Valley Forge was where George Washington waited out a long, bleak winter. For this we paid the extra first class fare?

The entry into New York is always a dramatic one on the long elevated section from the north. Then good track thru long tunnels, and finally a 12:16 arrival in Manhattan, where we happily lost the cigar smokers and most of the other occupants of our car.

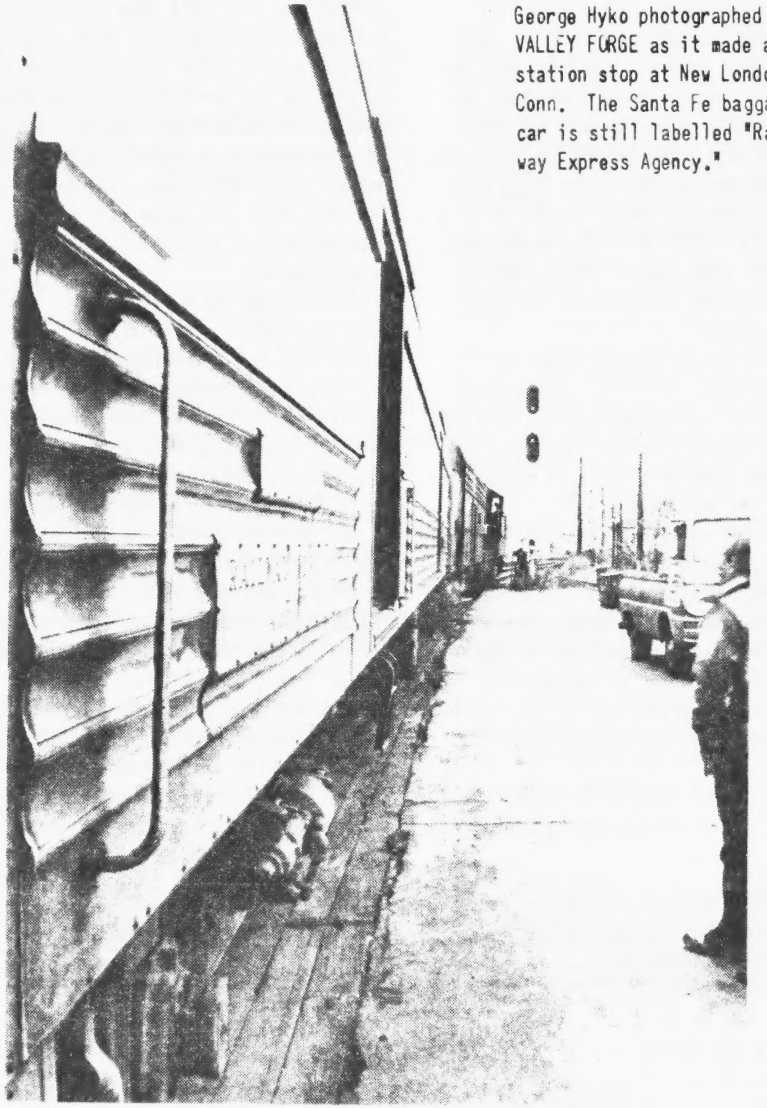
We sat in Penn Station for quite a while as the crew changed. What an absurdity! We even had a different parlor car attendant now, who of course couldn't connect anyone with their proper baggage, having just come on the scene.

At 12:26 the northbound BROADWAY LIMITED pulled alongside us and disgorged piles of people. It was a 2-hr, 36-min late arrival.

Finally leaving New York, we found a chance to ask our new attendant if we might get lunch in a snack bar car. Of course we could, but I explained that the door seemed locked. No, the doors aren't supposed to be locked between cars. He tried to budge it, and then with a mighty effort forced it open and propped it ajar for our relieved egress.

The next car was a PC snack bar coach, warm and humid and jammed with riders. And the lights were out. We asked the snack attendant for turkey sandwiches. He had just come on duty (in the middle of lunch hour) and claimed he couldn't sell any food until the lights came on, since he couldn't see to make change.

We waited at the head of a lengthening line for the car's lights to brighten. They did slightly, and the attendant, obviously upset over the condition of the car he'd just taken over, began business. He surveyed his stock and found only one



George Hyko photographed the VALLEY FORGE as it made a station stop at New London, Conn. The Santa Fe baggage car is still labelled "Railway Express Agency."

"breast of turkey" sandwich remaining. We bought it along with one of beef. I hope the others in line behind us got something satisfactory.

Returning to the "Nathan Hale" we ordered some drinks and opened our prepackaged sandwiches. It was the worst meal of our entire 8000-mile trip, either on the rails or on the ground. The Washington-made sandwiches (the same Paul Rayton wrote of earlier this year) were devoid of any garnish--just poor-quality turkey loaf and dry bread. The beef was as bad. I felt sorry for all the souls trapped in that coach behind us--no lights or ventilation, and only this lousy prepackaged attempt at food. Shades of SP's automat cars! Even SP's vile sandwiches were juicier than these! Surely Amtrak can find a better arrangement for food on these trains.

About 1:30 we got a slow order for about 10 minutes. At 1:43, just before Trenton we met an Amtrak train with mixed Amtrak and yellow UP cars. What was it--the NATIONAL LIMITED? If so it was running about an hour late.

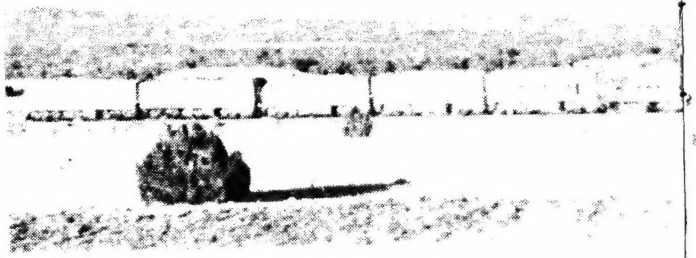
Leaving Trenton we hit the fastest speed of the day, trying to make up our 10 mins of lateness. But about 2:15, nearing Philadelphia, we stopped when a crane seemed to be blocking the right of way. After an investigation of the machine we were again underway, and at last pulled into Philadelphia, our destination, 15 mins late.

The 30th Street Station in Philly was very busy. Train announcements echoed about almost constantly, the announcer intoning them in a sort of Gregorian chant. (In Providence they had been made in a tongue resembling Welsh, or something, but in any case they upheld the old railroad tradition of unintelligibility.)

Thirtieth Street must have more Amtrak information available than any other spot. One conspicuously missing item, however, was any easily found information on transferring to the North Philadelphia Station, from which the BROADWAY leaves. You could do it cheaply by commuter train or maybe subway if you had little baggage and knew the area well. We found it a $3 cab ride between the two stations for unknowledgeable travelers.

It's a shame the BROADWAY can't use the 30th St. Station, where all the other trains are, but track layouts make it impractical. But maybe Amtrak could have a shuttle bus for connections between the two. At least a clarifying note in the timetables would help.

I alluded earlier to our westbound ride on the BROADWAY LIMITED--essentially a repeat performance of the rough but rather interesting ride we had eastbound. The BROADWAY this night included in the consist the much-noted rear observation lounge "Dana," the UP "Pacific Shore" sleeper which we occupied, a refurbished ex-SP lounge with color TV, and a twin-unit diner with chrome tubular kitchen chairs. The springy chairs helped to dampen the vibrations from the track.



On the first part of his journey, the author shot the front half of the SUPER CHIEF/EL CAP as it rounded a New Mexico curve.

The china of the diner was a new type introduced by Amtrak shortly before. It was a very attractive plain white with a broad blue band at the edge. The color combination harmonized nicely with the red, white and blue of the linens and the Amtrak uniforms of the waiters. Noting the light weight of the china, I wondered how long it would last in the rough service of a diner. It was much thinner than normal restaurant ware. I observed that at dinner about a third of the pieces served me were already badly chipped and cracked. Someone at Amtrak made a boo-boo.

The color TVs were engaging. The programs were just the usual TV pap, but the interesting thing was how the picture repeatedly broke up into weird psychedelic color patterns. I had to be dragged away from the sets.

The same defects in the refurbished cars that NARP earlier complained of were there. Most of the automatic doors were inoperative and required a strong arm. Movement between cars was difficult, especially for weaker people, and especially so because of the constant bouncing and jolting of the train. The new slip covers in the sleepers were already dirty, wrinkled, and showing other signs of wear. New paint in the cars was chipping off, showing the old beneath. The shade of our bedroom window kept snapping open on large bumps, and of course the car still seemed to be bottoming whenever we hit a good-sized irregularity in the track. Our porter showed us how to adjust the heat and air conditioning if it went out, which he expected it would do. However, it gave us no problems.

On the whole, Amtrak got a bum deal from the refurbishers of most of the cars on the train. They should be made to redo their work.

We reached Gary 15 mins late, and pulled into Chicago 10 mins behind--not bad for the BROADWAY. The last train of our trip would leave at 4:30pm--the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, in which we would live for 48 hrs across two major mountain ranges and two snowstorms.

Our tri-weekly train 5 is combined with train 55, the DENVER ZEPHYR, from Chicago to Denver. Checking our sleeping car tickets at the gate at Chicago Union Station, we found awaiting us a long train made up of the following: BN E unit, two UP B units, UP 6003 baggage-dorm, CB&Q "Silver Rein" coach, 2 Amtrak coaches (4540 & 4522), Santa Fe coach 2824, CB&Q "Silver Chef" diner, SP 3601 dome lounge, CZ "Silver Stirrup" dome coach, Amtrak slumbercoach 2030 ("Loch Lochy"), BN sleeper 1412, UP yellow sleeper "Pacific View" (in which we rode), Amtrak sleeper "Pacific Trail," and CB&Q sleeper "Silver Isle."

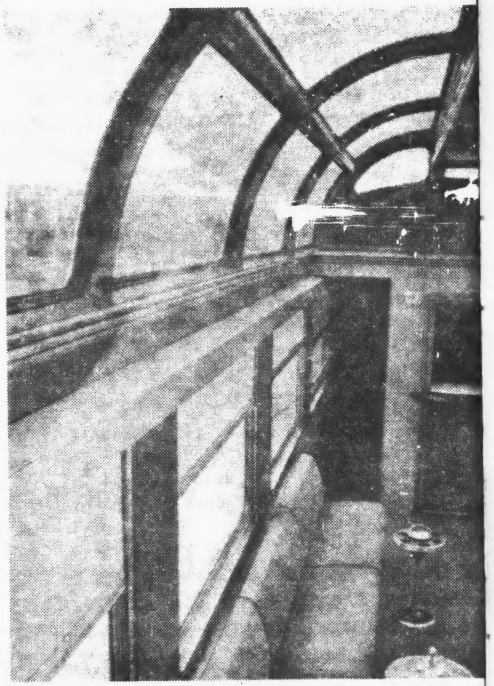
Though the train carried a Burlington diner, an SP crew were operating it. At dinner we found that the wine situation was much superior to that of the BROADWAY. We had a 1969 Krug Burgundy, and other patrons were ordering Wente white Riesling and another California red wine. The crew, with one notable exception, were excellent.

There was a major dining car problem, however. The lone diner was totally inadequate to handle that big train, which tonight was full. Waits of an hour and a half for dinner were not uncommon. At the least, the crew should take dinner reservations when they are so pressed for space. The waiters did a fantastic job in coping with such a crowd, but at higher supervisory levels there was no attempt at accommodation or even civility.

Matters were not quite so bad the second night out, after the 3 cars of the DENVER ZEPHYR (slumbercoach, dome coach, & BN sleeper) had been cut out at Denver. But lines for dinner were still the rule. The train was full of passengers all the way into California.

Despite these complaints, the ZEPHYR proved to be the most fun train of the trip. In large part the presence of the magnificent SP dome lounge made this train a joy. SP still owns these cars, and rents them to Amtrak. But Amtrak has refurbished them inside and out, and they are splendid indeed. Ours was completely reupholstered in bright red, making a colorful accent against the wintry wastes of snowy Colorado and Wyoming. The car was a gathering place for passengers, and soon everyone seemed to know everyone else. A great spirit of camaraderie developed among the train riders, and lacking route brochures or Amtrak representatives to call attention to points of interest, we were soon exchanging our own notes and comments on the scenery.

The feeling of spaciousness that the bar end of this dome uniquely gives is something Amtrak should study in designing future lounge cars. Amtrak should forthwith buy these cars, I decided, and I even calculated how the corporation might build some new ones like them, using flat glass for economy. The presence of the second dome from Chicago to Denver was an added treat. You had your choice of viewing spots. However, some knucklehead had been sticking "no smoking" signs



The bar end of the SP dome lounge gave a unique feeling of spaciousness. The car appears to be almost all glass.

on the front dome windows, and on the windows of end doors on other cars as well. I appreciate the restrictions on smoking, but let's be reasonable about the placement of the signs! I tried to remove one but found it fastened to stay, with epoxy or something. Amtrak, please note. Don't curtail our viewing areas with signs that belong elsewhere.

The first night on the ZEPHYR was of course over the rough BN track. We were expecting it, but after a night on the BROADWAY it was getting to be too much. The poor ride of the train was a popular conversation topic. People complained but seemed good-humored and accepting of the problem. At least our common complaints furnished us with ice-breaking conversational material.

During this first night we entered a Nebraska blizzard. Lifting the shade in the morning we saw snowflakes moving horizontally, plastering themselves on telephone poles, while windmills revolved furiously and farmers fought to move sad-looking cattle to shelter. Near the Colorado border we stopped for over a half hour. An approaching freight (we learned much later) was to take a siding but the switch had frozen, so it had to keep moving and we had to wait. The train was perfectly comfortable and cheery, while all outside the blizzard was being battled. Between cars some snow had entered and gathered on the metal plates of the walkway, making movement hazardous. Mats should be carried aboard to cover such slippery areas. An improvised towel served at one vestibule.

It's quite a nice feeling to be sitting enjoying a hot breakfast aboard a busy diner while you coast along thru a subfreezing storm. I recommend it to anyone who hasn't tried it lately. You get quite a feeling of smugness and superiority from your cozy vantage point.

Passengers to Denver found themselves an hour late. We went outdoors there to watch our train being taken apart and put back together. Soon we were heading for Cheyenne, and the sun was emerging. At Cheyenne we took advantage of the long stop to stroll around in the crisp air and watch our train being serviced. The striking Cheyenne station evokes some sadness. There are so many signs of things that used to be bigger and more exciting. The station newsstand was closed. There was a window for collection of unemployment checks.

Wyoming never ceases to amaze me. There are so many things happening on those broad, apparently uninhabited expanses. A cowboy rides out from nowhere. Where is his dwelling? A dirt road leads off toward the horizon with no sign of anything at the other end. And especially the Union Pacific Railroad is busy running mighty freight trains across the state on its excellent tracks. And everywhere the Interstate Highway signs and the big oil company names.

Westward travel is more leisurely than eastward--you keep setting your watches back and have extra time for viewing and loafing. By the second day we seemed to know where everyone was heading, and all were exchanging ideas about what to do when they got there. Train offers the ideal travel pace. Slow enough to take things in, relax and think and have time to talk with other people. No other mode of transportation offers these opportunities--so important to those from the hectic, faceless environment of our modern cities and suburbs.

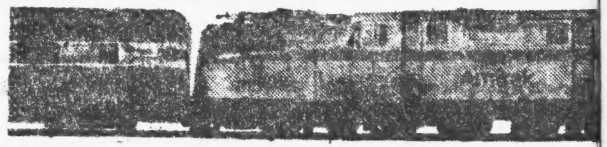
A number of travelers from other countries were riding the ZEPHYR, getting an overview of our land from the comfort of a train, as they are accustomed to do at home. They added an interesting international flair to the trip, and their presence naturally enlarged conversational possibilities considerably.

In the dark we crossed Utah and most of Nevada, and at breakfast found ourselves entering Reno. We'd made up all but 18 mins of lateness on our padded schedule. At breakfast I learned that SP prepares French toast in the traditional, excellent railroad manner--big, thick triangular hunks of toast. But I was astounded when the waiter brought the syrup for my toast: it was a bottle of Macdonald's pure Canadian maple syrup that sells for $1.09 in my supermarket!

Our heads were full of scenery already from our nearly 8000 miles of travel. But the best was saved for the very end. As we pulled out of Reno, a snow began falling. The ground was bare, and as we curved up the Truckee River canyon the snowflakes came thicker and faster. Soon it was a moving postcard scene--pines and firs and autumn-colored leaves dusted with new snow, rushing water and snow-capped boulders, trees with green circles below where the snow hadn't yet reached. Every face was at the windows. It was a magnificent moving panorama as

we climbed ever higher, westward to the summit of the Sierra.

On Union Pacific the previous day we were pulled by 3 yellow engines of that railroad. Now we had 4 Southern Pacific F units drawing us steadily up toward Donner Summit. Still the snow came, thicker and heavier as we progressed upwards. For about four hours we watched this show of nature until we felt surfeited. The train curved this way and that as we climbed and eased down the other side, as if we mustn't miss a single angle of the scene. Many praise the scenery of the WP's Feather River Canyon, but to me SP's route is far superior.



The storm had reached the point where Interstate 80 below us was all but closed. We looked down on the slippery, treacherous highway, practically devoid of traffic, millions of dollars of concrete sitting vacant. A sign read "Speed limit 25 mph, chains required." Here and there a big truck was slowly moving along. I was very glad I didn't have to drive that route. We watched the capricious highway below us as our reliable train moved steadily on to its destination.

As we descended the west slope of the Sierra, the snow gradually lightened, and at the point where it changed to rain we found ourselves in predominantly deciduous forests, brightly bedecked in late autumn oranges and golds. A fantastic color scene to follow the drama of the white storm on the mountain tops.

The Sierra foothills were abnormally green, thanks to the early and copious rains. As we reached the flat valley we noted the contrast between the coastal area and the inland range land of yesterday. Here the cattle wallowed in mild, rich greenness, while in mid-America they fought the harsh coldness of winter. A striking and entertaining lesson in geography, brought to us courtesy of Amtrak and its amazing trains.

Sacramento is the next-to-last stop on this Overland Route. We sat there a ridiculous 16 minutes while a new crew came aboard! Sacramento is a 45-minute freeway drive from Oakland, just a spit away, and particularly so when you've been coming toward it for two solid days. Then all of a sudden for this last tiny leg of the trip, a new crew! How absurd the union work rules are! If anything kills rail travel in America, it'll be them.

The rains had been so heavy this fall that huge puddles lay about here in the Sacramento Valley. As we moved along we encountered periodically a heavy shower that dashed the dome windows with rain, while across the valley the sun was shining thru a break in the clouds.

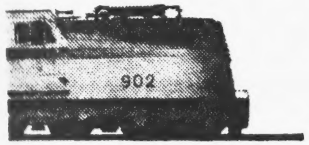
We got a slow order because of track maintenance as we neared San Pablo Bay. We crept along thru a green mire with big puddles on both sides. I wondered if cars on the freeway above and to our right wondered why that passenger train was poking around in that swamp down there.

Over the big San Pablo Bay railroad bridge and then fast curving along the bay shore thru Crockett and Martinez, stops the train no longer makes. It was getting near time to ready ourselves for detraining, but faces stayed at the dome windows, watching the entrancing view of San Francisco Bay with weird water patterns and odd gray colors under the storm clouds.

Reaching the straightaway from Richmond on into Oakland, we picked up speed and roared thru Albany and Berkeley with horn blaring, and I a little worried about this section of right-of-way with all its unprotected street crossings and the careless drivers.

We pulled into the Oakland depot three minutes early. Our Amtrak adventure had come to an end. We detrained fresh and relaxed, full of stories and new vitality.

Rail travel must never disappear from America. With all the dehumanizing elements present in our world, train travel is an activity that's built to human scale. It can stand much improving, but we need it much the same that it is today. We don't want to travel on a 400-mph rail vehicle; we don't want to be shot through tubes like some department store merchandise; neither do we want to be shaken to death on rotten rails that management failure and government ineptitude force upon us. We want to be able to travel like civilized human beings in vehicles that are made to be inhabited by humans.



I wish everyone had the opportunity to get out on the rails like we did and get a good look at the expanse of America. It's good for the spirit to travel this way at least now and then. The powers that be owe it to Americans to preserve and extend the chance for anyone to be able to travel around the land in this most human of technological travel modes. Amtrak has a big job assigned it. It's done many good things, and made some mistakes. It deserves much support, for we all deserve the opportunities that rail travel provides.

It is with regret that we must announce that our East Coast Editor, Steve Farrar, is no longer with us, effective with this issue. Due to the pressure of other commitments, Steve will no longer be producing his column which appeared in each issue of Rail Travel Newsletter.

We will continue, of course, to cover the rail travel news of the entire nation, but the news from all corners of the country will be integrated into the main body of news in each issue, rather than our running a separate column for Eastern news only.

We would like to take this opportunity publicly to thank Steve for his many devoted contributions to RTN, and for his assistance in the evolution of the newsletter into its present form. We will miss him. (In the photo, Steve is on one of the last runs of Ft. Eustis Military RR.)

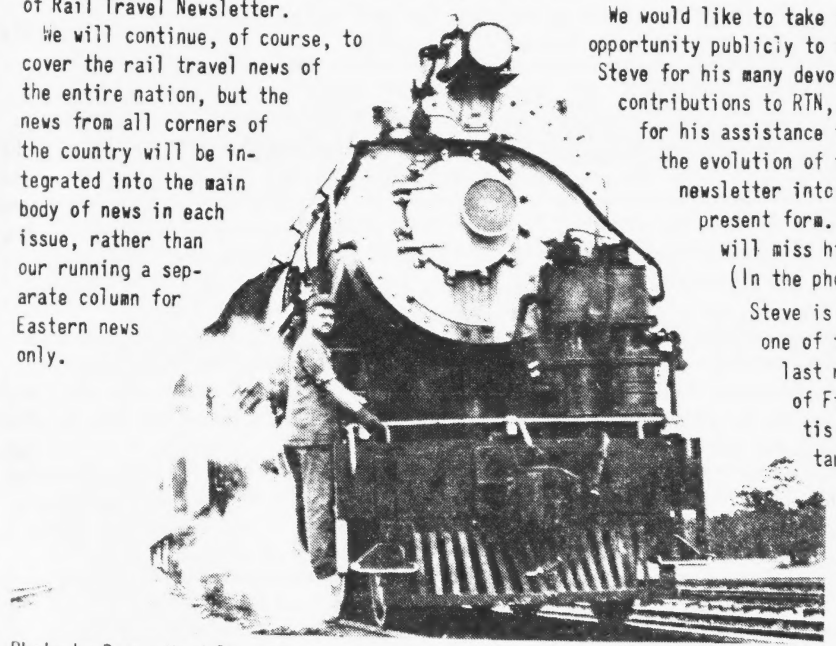


Photo by Danny Wondolkowski.